

QEP Topics: An Overview

Research Project Summary

The purpose of this research project was to explore a pattern of intended Student Learning Outcomes identified by institutions for Quality Enhancement Plans (QEPs). Two specific objectives were to:

- Gain insight into what aspects of student learning are most commonly selected by institutions in the U.S. Southern states as institutional priorities, and
- Explore the relationship between institutional student learning priorities and institutional type (degree level and governance control).

The sample consisted of **391** institutional Quality Enhancement Plans (QEPs) accepted by SACSCOC between 2007 and 2011. Two researchers conducted textual analysis and deductive coding of QEP topics and intended student learning outcomes based on the adapted AAC&U's (2007) Essential Learning Outcomes framework with thirteen (13) QEP Outcome Categories and four (4) general QEP Topic Areas.

Relative Popularity of QEP Topics - *What are institutional student learning priorities? In what direction is higher education moving in terms of focal aspects of student learning?* – See Figure 1 on p. 2.

- QEP topics are varied and cover a broad range of intended outcomes.
- QEP intended outcomes generally reflect current student learning priorities in the higher education community as exemplified by the AAC&U's Essential Learning Outcomes framework.

Dispersion of QEP Topics - *How distinctive are QEP topics? Do institutions take advantage of freedom provided by accreditors in selecting topics and intended outcomes for the QEPs?* – See Figure 2 on p. 2.

- QEP intended outcomes are relatively well spread out across different categories and do not overly concentrate in few selected categories.
- Institutions appear to take advantage of the flexibility afforded by the Commission in selecting QEP topic areas and intended student learning outcomes.

Selected Key Institutional Characteristics and QEP Topics - *Do intended outcomes of institutional student learning initiatives tend to differ by institutional degree level and governance control? Do different types of institutions have different priorities in terms of student learning?* – See Figure 3 on p. 2.

- Selection of QEP topics appears to be driven largely by specific institutional missions and local institutional needs, rather than by the institutional type.
 - Statistical analyses findings -- although Level and Control contribute to prediction of QEP Topic Area (Intellectual and Practical Skills, Personal and Social Responsibility, Integrative and Applied Learning), the associations between Level/QEP Topic Area and Control/QEP Topic Area are relatively weak. Further, variation in the QEP Topic Areas that is explained by Level and Control is small.

Figure 1

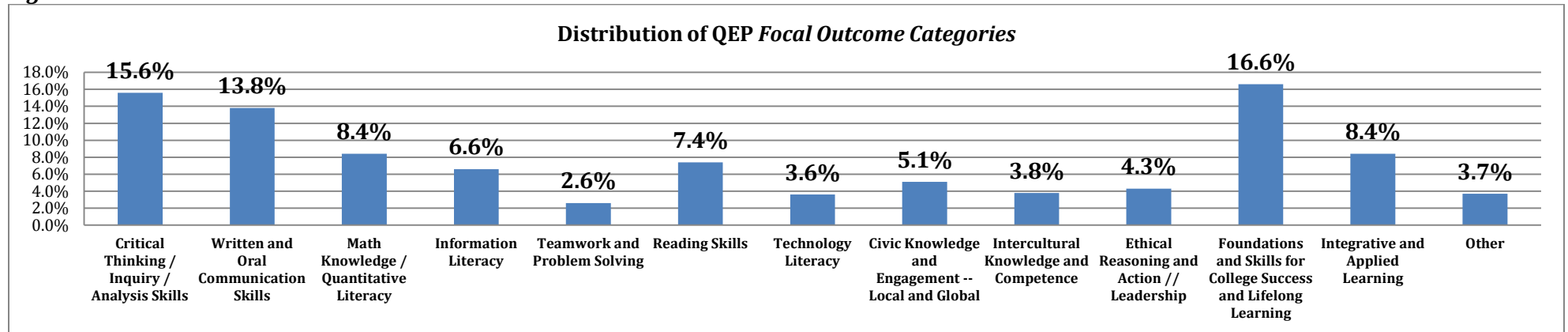


Figure 2

| Indices of Qualitative Variation (IQV) | | | | | | | | |
|---|-------------|---------|---------|--------------|------------|----------|--------------|--------------|
| | Overall IQV | Control | | Degree Level | | | | |
| | | Public | Private | Associate | Bachelor's | Master's | < 3 Doctoral | > 3 Doctoral |
| 4 QEP Topic Areas (Intellectual and Practical Skills, Personal and Social Responsibility, Integrative and Applied Learning, Other) | 0.76 | 0.66 | 0.84 | 0.61 | 0.75 | 0.73 | 0.83 | 0.92 |
| 13 QEP Outcome Categories | 0.97 | 0.97 | 0.95 | 0.94 | 0.96 | 0.94 | 0.96 | 0.95 |

Figure 3

| QEP Focal Outcome Categories | Critical Thinking/ Inquiry/ Analysis | Written and Oral Communication | Math/ Science Knowledge/ Quantitative Literacy | Information Literacy | Teamwork and Problem Solving | College Reading | Technology Literacy | Civic Knowledge and Engagement - Local and Global | Intercultural Knowledge and Competence | Ethical Reasoning and Action/ Leadership | Foundations and Skills for College Success and Lifelong Learning | Integrative and Applied Learning | Other |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|----------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------|---|--|--|--|----------------------------------|-------|
| <i>Associate</i> (n=117) | 8.5% | 9.4% | 17.1% | 6.8% | 3.4% | 13.7% | 10.3% | 0.9% | 0% | 0.9% | 23.1% | 3.4% | 2.6% |
| <i>Bachelor's</i> (n=63) | 15.9% | 17.5% | 7.9% | 6.3% | 1.6% | 7.9% | 0% | 9.5% | 4.8% | 4.8% | 15.9% | 4.8% | 3.2% |
| <i>Master's</i> (n=89) | 20.2% | 21.3% | 1.1% | 7.9% | 2.2% | 4.5% | 2.2% | 5.6% | 5.6% | 6.7% | 12.4% | 6.7% | 3.4% |
| <i><3 Doctoral</i> (n=73) | 19.2% | 13.7% | 5.5% | 6.8% | 1.4% | 4.1% | 0% | 6.8% | 5.5% | 6.8% | 12.3% | 15.1% | 2.7% |
| <i>>3 Doctoral</i> (n=49) | 18.4% | 6.1% | 6.1% | 4.1% | 4.1% | 2.0% | 0% | 6.1% | 6.1% | 4.1% | 16.3% | 18.4% | 8.2% |
| Private (n=176) | 14.8% | 15.9% | 2.8% | 7.4% | 2.3% | 4.5% | 0.6% | 7.4% | 6.8% | 8.5% | 13.1% | 11.9% | 4.0% |
| Public (n=215) | 16.3% | 12.1% | 13.0% | 6.0% | 2.8% | 9.8% | 6.0% | 3.3% | 1.4% | 0.9% | 19.5% | 5.6% | 3.3% |